

# Urban Imaginaries, Homelessness, and the Literary City: Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* and Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician*

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## Introduction

This paper is concerned with the entanglements of urban imaginaries, city-making, and socio-ecological crises, and the potentials of literature to make a difference. Examining recent events in Melbourne and Sydney involving the expansion of powers to penalise the homeless and to *clean up* city streets, I find material and discursive articulations of capitalist-colonial urban imaginaries. I argue for fiction's capacities to express and resist these articulations and to affect what can become in cities and what cities can become. In studies of Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* and Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician*, I explore literature's capacities to contest city-making practices that privilege certain visions of how we should live: visions which, paradoxically, entail rendering invisible, excluding and erasing the disadvantage and damage produced in pursuing them (for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples), and the difference that places such visions at risk. Wright and Hospital cultivate readers' apprehensions of deprivation and exclusion as things intrinsic to cities—neither separate nor separable from them. They also expand the scope for cities to be imagined differently: as continuously varying, permeable assemblages, rather than as constantly improving, coherent, stable, secure organisms. They highlight literature's value in a post-political climate in which many believe that attaining the good life—in the best of all possible cities—is *naturally* dependent upon capital's ascendancy, and in which many eschew the wider universe of potential responses to our heightening existential risks.<sup>1</sup>

## Melbourne and Sydney On the Move

In Australia, at least one million people experience poverty, deprivation and exclusion (Saunders); more than 105,000 are homeless (Homelessness Australia 2016), roughly one-quarter of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders (Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Factsheet'; Homelessness Australia 2017). The health effects of homelessness include depression, poor nutrition, poor dental health, substance abuse, and mental illness (Homelessness Australia 2016). Also, homeless people are 'profoundly vulnerable to climate change related weather events . . . air pollution and . . . changing distribution of vector-borne diseases' (Hanson et al. 2). People sleeping on central city streets are often the most visible and the most vulnerable homeless (City of Sydney; City of Melbourne).

In September 2017, after lengthy debate, the City of Melbourne Council withdrew a proposal to give police legislated powers to confiscate CBD rough sleepers' unattended belongings. According to lord mayor Robert Doyle, these laws would help clean up 'waste' and preserve the 'public realm' (Masanauskas). Victoria's Chamber of Commerce and Industry supported the proposal, referencing the need to resolve risks to 'Melbourne's reputation as the world's most liveable city' (Dow).<sup>2</sup> Human rights-based concerns were expressed, as were fears that the laws would worsen the deprivations and exclusions experienced by the homeless, push

them out of the CBD, and increase their vulnerabilities, although Doyle argued that this was not the intent (Lucas). On withdrawing the proposal, Doyle indicated that council officers would apply existing laws more rigorously, with police support (Mills and Dow). Between late 2016 and August 2017, analogous events associated with Sydney's financial district also took place. Approximately fifty homeless people (Brook) erected tent dwellings in Martin Place. After intense media coverage and public debate, these 'tent city' inhabitants moved on, in advance of new State laws empowering police to 'remove people or goods who "were unacceptable impacts on the public"' (Stuart and Malone).

While concerns were raised about these city-making initiatives (Adams; Dow; Mills and Dow; Petty, 'Ban'), public discourse also took other trajectories. Posts to the *Herald Sun*'s Facebook page on the Melbourne events, and comments following an article on Martin Place in the *Australian* online (Ritchie), demonised and dehumanised the homeless, attributed responsibility to them for their conditions, and proposed radical and violent solutions to their presence, including, in a Swiftian regression, feeding them to the hungry.

These responses are symptomatic of broader strategies shaping Australian cities, where membership of *the public* requires compliance with normative subjectivities that preserve and extend capitalist-colonial city-making practices. The perceived dangers of encountering the differences made apparent by the homeless are couched in globally informed economic and civilisational terms: as external, less-than-human, threats to a city's 'most liveable' status. Hostile architecture (Atkinson and While; Petty 'London Spikes'; Siebert) makes city spaces less liveable for those hoping to use them for purposes other than shopping, working and entertainment. Criminal law, and criminal acts of physical violence, are visited disproportionately upon the homeless (Sydney Criminal Lawyers). Where they cannot be moved on, the homeless are made invisible and imagined as being absent. The *public* convinces itself of the city's cleansed reality, despite the uncomfortable sensation that other bodies still inhabit and shape urban spaces.

Literary scholars concerned with matters of social and environmental justice might ask, in this context, how can literature intervene? One response involves literary interventions in social imaginaries as they relate to cities.

## Urban Imaginaries

Adams et al. explain that

theories of social imaginaries elucidate the ways in which cultural configurations of meaning creatively configure the human encounter with—and formation (as articulation and doing) of—the world, on the one hand, and, articulate their centrality for the emergence, formation and reproduction of social institutions and practices, that is, of social change and social continuity, on the other. (19)

Social imaginaries are collective (Blokker and Doyle 16–17), dynamic and open agglomerations of discursive and material elements capable of shaping humans' concepts and sense of the world and our relations with and in the world, and of what we and other bodies in the world can do. While social imaginaries can reproduce, normalise and habituate clichés that diminish human and more-than-human capacities for living, they can also be transformed and can intensify those capacities. (Here I acknowledge Abram's term 'more-than-human')

which alludes to the earthly life-world of sentient and non-sentient agentic bodies which exist alongside, in relationship to and co-constituted with the human.) Similarly, urban imaginaries are productions of onto-epistemologically diverse bodies always in dynamic relation, and they are discursively and materially co-constituted with cities. More than representations of cities (Donald 423), they are processual, agentic comings-together of matter and discourse, of artefacts, ideas, practices, and myriad other interdependent and interpenetrating, human and more-than-human bodies.<sup>3</sup> They carry transformative capacities: arising from and, in turn, reshaping, what we can do in the city and what the city can do. At their healthiest, urban imaginaries are engendered by and engender openness to possibilities for affirmative relations with other bodies, and they expand human capacities to live ethically and responsively.<sup>4</sup>

Urban imaginaries are numerous, always in process, and contested, though not always on equal terms. Indeed, ascendant neo-liberal, capitalist-colonial, and globalised urban imaginaries, and a politics of consensus—not least regarding responses to entangled ecological, social and economic crises—serve to constrain what cities we are encouraged to imagine, what cities we are able to materialise, and who is included in these processes (Gleeson; Harvey; Swyngedouw; Adams et al. 35). Consequently, we should attend to urban vulnerabilities and exclusions, and to violent acts inflicted upon bodies in the name of particular urban imaginaries. Discursive and material shadows have been cast over these acts and their polluting, degrading and transformational effects. However, many of these effects—once considered externalities—are increasingly found to be coexistent and entangled with city lives, not separable from them.<sup>5</sup> Their forces, and those of other externalities returning through evidently porous city boundaries, put at risk not only those least able to cope, but also the ostensibly secure *publics* on whose behalf cities are made. In Australia, shadows also cloak historical and ongoing acts of dispossession, the putting down of resistance to city-making, and the violent erasures of difference. Australia's originating, ongoing, and enduring, exclusions are those of Indigenous peoples and more-than-human life from their homes—many of which are subsumed into cities—and of Indigenous onto-epistemologies from non-Indigenous Australian social (and urban) imaginaries and world (and city)-making practices.<sup>6</sup>

### Storying Cities

Stories, in works of literature and elsewhere, manifest discursively and materially: they express and transform capacities to become, to know, to inhabit, to relate in, and to shape, the world. As stories, literary fictions express and shape the connections between what we can think (and do) in relation to cities (imagined and actual, past, present, and future), what life (and living) is suppressed and enabled in the production and enactment of these capacities, and what cities can do.<sup>7</sup> Stories (in many forms) are—and are also involved in—the poetic and material manifestation of different onto-epistemologies: some of which diverge from dominant strands of Western and colonial-capitalist thought.

Helen Verran argues that stories, as Australian Indigenous cultures understand them, provide a 'conceptual resource' ('Re-Imagining' 242) for making sense of things and for making things.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous ontic and epistemic practices commonly embrace dynamic notions of deep, cyclical time pervading the present, and of accumulated intimacy with local and always-already vibrant bodies (environment, landscape, nature, space), and understandings of irreducible human and more-than-human relationality and interdependency for future sustainability.<sup>9</sup> Country is foundational to Indigenous onto-epistemologies and cultural practices. It is known and lived as a vital and vibrant text to be storied, communicated with, and cared for as it cares for people, and is continuous with people (Watson, *Aboriginal* 20).

Cultural production, including ceremony—the performance of relations with country, via storytelling in song, dance, movement, painting, and writing—is oriented toward the enactment, re-embodiment, and repotentialisation of the qualities of country rather than its representation (Christie; Rose; Watson, *Aboriginal* 36). So are *everyday* practices: hunting, farming, gathering (Verran, ‘Re-Imagining’ 248). As Irene Watson puts it, ‘there are other ways of knowing and being’ (*Aboriginal* 146) and these inform social imaginaries that are profoundly different from those most familiar to Western colonial-capitalist Australians. Consequently, affirming, and responding to, these ways of knowing and being, and their associated imaginaries, and to the myriad human and more-than-human bodies (past, present, and future) we have excluded, might improve our prospects for inclusive and recuperative cultivations of divergent, and transformational urban imaginaries.

Three non-Indigenous concepts also inform my arguments on the potentials for different onto-epistemologies and writing to come together and transform urban imaginaries: those of *the inhabitant*, *the assemblage*, and *divergence*. First, Henri Lefebvre’s proposition of the ‘right to the city’ gestures toward privileging the interests and well-being of *inhabitants*<sup>10</sup> (in all their varieties, including the homeless, the poor, the deprived, *and* the more-than-human), rather than those of colonisers, consumers, the state, corporations and businesses, and property owners (as per Western legal conventions). Second, a line can be drawn between Lefebvre’s inhabitants and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *assemblage* concept,<sup>11</sup> referring broadly to the processes and capacities of impermanent, rhizomic agglomerations of bodies in relations, without single source, centre or essence (Deleuze and Parnet 69). Altering the bodies (human, sentient, and otherwise)<sup>12</sup> inhabiting and co-constituting an urban imaginary *and* a city will alter what these bodies, an urban imaginary, *and* a city can do.<sup>13</sup> For DeLanda (*Assemblage* 3), cities are ‘amenable’ to treatment as ‘assemblages of assemblages,’ in which ‘[t]he points of intersections mark the beginnings of new worlds’ (Arsić 143). Third, and deeply intertwined with the first two concepts, an embrace of divergence might enable affirmative responses to dominant, convergent imaginaries—imaginaries which involve presumptions that we can produce the best of all possible cities, and that simplify ideas of what a city might become and what might become in it. For Deleuze (*Logic* 113–14), the world is continuously produced by the play of divergences: by the interactions of compossibles (things which are compatible or possible in conjunction with one another) *and* impossibles (things which are not). Smith and Protevi write, in this respect, of a single, ‘chaotic universe in which divergent series [of relations] trace endlessly bifurcating paths, and give rise to violent discords and dissonances that are never resolved’ (Section 2, para. 9). Divergence suggests a world produced by the actualisation of certain differential relations *and* by the non-actualisation of all other potential relations (the virtual), albeit these potentials are not necessarily lost as the world becomes (Lypka and Sigler para. 8). Similarly, a city includes all the virtual cities that have *not* become and the potentials for many alternative actualisations remain (Deleuze, *Logic* 173–74). Deleuze notes that literature can express these qualities and processes of divergence: the existence of multiple worlds within the same world (Deleuze, *Cinema* 131; Deleuze, *Logic* 114; Uhlmann 21); that no body experiences the world in the same way (Bowden 321; Nicholls 142–44); and that no body expresses the same world (Deleuze, *Proust* 28; Rodowick 98), nor, indeed, the same city.

In different, though resonant, ways, the Indigenous onto-epistemologies and the Western concepts referenced here can help us to apprehend the violence, damage and exclusions inherent in and immanent to city-making. They can also encourage imaginings of cities as non-hierarchical, non-centralised, non-essential things, facing indeterminate, unstipulated futures, and flush with relationally differing bodies bound up in each other’s becomings. Via

their appeals to openness and exteriority, they are more inclusive and accepting of interdependencies between, and of the co-constitution of city futures by always-already different and often interdependent bodies, including bodies that some might persuade themselves have been excised, erased, excluded, controlled, changed or made invisible. Together, they help us entertain the prospect that we need neither imagine nor make cities solely as perfections of some prior whole, as delivering on an enduring vision, or as attending to one dominant interest, such as the valorisation of economic exchange value, or as responding to the desires of a narrowly framed *public*. Instead, they encourage us to focus upon augmenting bodies' relational powers of living, upon becoming more attuned to the diverse life that moves around and through the city, and upon pursuing *other* urban possibilities. These onto-epistemic orientations inform my argument that Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* and Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician* carry capacities to transform urban imaginaries, and, indeed, to express non-urban imaginaries.

### Other Possibilities: Literary Cities

Set at the end of a climate-change devastated 21<sup>st</sup> century, Alexis Wright's novel, *The Swan Book*, follows traumatised and displaced Aboriginal girl Oblivion Ethylene's (Oblivia's) movements from devastated Indigenous country to devastated city and back. One third of the novel covers Oblivia's experiences in an unnamed, radically transforming, east-coast, Australian city. This 'catastrophic' (3547) city (to some, a 'paradise' (2957)) is an assemblage of relationally entangled agentic bodies: privileged and disadvantaged; human and more-than-human (warming air and seas, birds, water, wind, spirits, ghosts, flora, stories). Homeless human multitudes exist in limbo: inhabiting ruined buildings, wandering flooded streets at night, sleeping on other streets during daylight, invisible to the 'general public' (3553). Privileged people—including Oblivia's husband, Australia's first Aboriginal President, Warren Finch—live in denial of the difference permeating and transforming the city and threatening their walled security: the poor multitudes; burgeoning flora and fauna (dismissed as 'mess,' 'obscure,' 'useless' and 'redundant' for city living (3774)), and climate change-driven inundation ('rain never stopped falling' (3432)). However, we read that they cannot do so forever. As humans flee, country recovers and re-covers the collapsing city.

Traversing the Queensland rainforest and Brisbane of the 1950s and 1960s, and Sydney in the 1990s, Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician* follows Lucia-Lucy, Fu Hsi-Charlie, Catherine, and Gabriel, as they investigate the disappearance of their childhood friend, Cat Reilly. Hospital's characters inhabit the contact zones between Sydney's 'city proper' (99) and the violent, impoverished, precarious shadow spaces of the labyrinthine 'quarry' (which is discussed in more detail later in this paper). They try to navigate the violence in their own lives, and explore the qualities of agency as they traverse these starkly unequal, though intimately entangled worlds. Identities become fluid as bodies move between worlds of immigrant and white-settler, between privilege and poverty, and between the subterranean 'quarry' and official *civilisation*.

### Dominant Visions

In both novels, we encounter a number of the city-making strategies discussed earlier: imagining and making cities dedicated to the ascendancy of capitalist-colonialism; diminishing the powers of living of the homeless and poor *and* holding them responsible for their conditions. The privileged, conspicuously consumerist city residents of *The Swan Book* attempt to ignore, deny and shield themselves from experiences of difference, including those

arising from the catastrophic forces of climate change; the homeless multitudes literally floating around the city; and the excluded and violated Indigenous peoples and country of the colonised continent. City walls are built to protect privileged lives from change, and non-native *Christmas* trees are planted around homes 'to muffle the sound of the ocean' (3012). Lights, continuous noise ('non-stop pattering' (2986)), and conversation focused entirely upon consumption (3043), drown out thought of life beyond.

When privileged consumers do venture into the city, they pass swiftly by the 'barely noticeable' homeless sleeping outside 'prestigious department stores':

you would never know if they were alive or dead. Their lullaby was the continuous sound of shoes clipping the pavement. The general public watched over them like guardian angels rushing by, while ignoring the dreams pervading the air . . . (3553)

Wright writes with painful irony of a city shaped by recurrent 'cleansing' (3826). Children recall removals of Aboriginal people in the 'old days' (3827). '[U]nemployed people' are 'disappeared into thin air apparently' (3631). On behalf of 'the decent people of mainstream civilization' (804), many others are removed to Oblivia's home country 'from other "more visible" parts of Australia' (802). Later in the novel, as Warren Finch's tribal elders attempt to mourn his death and claim his body, they camp outside the city church. In response, the police 'throw the bush people out,' and they eventually leave the city that 'despised their presence' (4038).

In *The Last Magician*, we read of lines, borders, rift valleys, and abysses constructed between Sydney's 'city proper' (99) and 'the quarry'; between those deemed civilised and those designated *other*. 'Deviation from the ordinary . . . [and] sheer *foreignness*' (85) are the sources of Australian nightmares. Accordingly, the privileged lay claim to an effective separation: 'The concept of seepage is not countenanced by the honourable members of parliament, the directors of public welfare, the rulers of straight lines' (100). We read, sensitive to its *doublespeak*, that:

infiltration of the city proper is denied and the spreading is not a problem, not a problem at all, officially speaking. Officially, there is a policy of containment. Conditions with respect to the quarry, the government announces daily on national television, are stable. The boundaries and demarcation points are clear, although they cannot be shown on a map. Between city and quarry, the division is absolute. (99)

People are 'taught what not to see' (22) and the elite turn 'a blind eye' (289): not only to those deemed a civilisational risk, but also to their own acts of violence toward (and, we discover, their interactions with) those people. And there are those among the elite, ensconced in their Point Piper 'enclave of urban delights' (365), who deny altogether the quarry's existence. It is, guests are assured, 'a figment of the morbid imagination' (369).

Even where the existence of the excluded is acknowledged, they are held accountable for their own impoverishment and exclusion: 'They choose this, the government ministers and the businessmen and people from the university and the wise judges in their cascading wigs all say. They want it this way. . . . they have chosen to be there' (102). Quarry inhabitants are not deemed to be participants in, or even products of, urbanisation. They are variously described

by elite members of Sydney's public (and the media) as not counting (322), as animals ('more like monkeys than us' (102)), as ants (95), vermin (96), invasive burrowers ('Mole People' (95)), and as a proliferating 'virus' (106)) threatening *civilisational* health.

Judge Robinson Gray (Cat's killer) suggests 'that the ability to be intelligently "cruel" when the occasion demands is the hallmark of enduring civilisations' (281) and those in power propose 'triage' (100) as a euphemistic descriptor of the necessarily violent response to these perceived threats. He alludes to that violence: 'There comes a time, a gentleman is saying, radiation therapy and cancer cells, the amputation of a limb to save the whole, the necessary pruning of the rhubarb plant' (370). Other, more explicit voices of public opinion (taxi drivers) suggest that the quarry should be blown up.<sup>14</sup>

In both Wright's and Hospital's literary cities, a blind certainty prevails that, despite the transformations seeping in, the capitalist-colonial city can function as an efficient organism, removing threats and waste, confident that they will not return. In both cases, however, these certainties are unfounded. The homeless and the unhomed are always with us.

### Divergent Imaginaries

*The Swan Book* and *The Last Magician* offer readers differing city imaginaries. Although Wright and Hospital undoubtedly write from different cultural experiences and philosophical heritages, we find city assemblages in their writing: complex multiplicities which are porous, permeable, always in flux and undergoing transformation rather than stable, hygienic, striated, territorialised, bounded, interior organisms. The cities imagined are not the hygienic, protected, and efficient urban realms that carry the capitalist colony inexorably toward the best of all possible worlds. Rather, Wright and Hospital immerse readers in cities of the excluded and the displaced, and in doing so they enable us to re-apprehend how cities are made and what they can do. They do not necessarily re-centre the marginalised and de-centre the privileged; rather they write the city as a multiplicity of more-than-human and not only privileged, relational inhabitants.

Wright's city is labyrinthine (3652),<sup>15</sup> inhabited by multitudes who move outside or are deemed not to meet normative expectations of the urban human. City-makers cannot erase difference, including Indigenous life, and they are irretrievably exposed to transformational ecological crises. Privileged and excluded bodies are allied in their vulnerability to anthropogenic violence, and to displacement.

Bodies that the city's wealthy seek to exclude and render invisible, including the homeless, are no longer hidden, precisely because Wright's narrative is thick with attention to their invisibility and to 'poor people's stories' (3777). Wright frequently attends to the capacities of writer, reader, human, animal, and more-than-human to disrupt a 'sense of invisibility' (3773). The reader is immersed into the 'lower, poor, and central parts of the city' (3371), into the fluid world of displaced inhabitants who, paradoxically, become intrinsic participants in city-making. We are *in* the 'invisible world of the city' (3488)—invisible to the elite, but not to its inhabitants. With Oblivia, we move among 'gangs of street children' (3463), 'hordes' (3478), 'large crowds' (3515), 'multitudes' (3542), 'conglomerate[s] of bodies' (3539), poor people of all ages, sexes, and races, their children 'mingling together like friends' (3476) as they roam dark spaces. They are 'the sleepless of the world with no peace in their souls' (3491). When they can, they sleep in cardboard boxes, and beneath rubbish, sometimes 'standing around for hours in floodwater, holding their belongings to their chests until the

waters subsided' (3386). Many, unable to sleep, 'just lay there, and cursed the fact that they were still alive' (3491). Along with these revenant masses, the spirits of the dead and of country still inhabit and shape city spaces. We read of drought-buster and fog spirits (3383, 3930), of spirits of all those never 'taken home' (3690), and of 'thousands of ghosts' (3692) of birds and humans.

Wright's narrator imagines a 'dilapidated city' (289) in a 'dilapidated country in a dilapidated world' (266). However, Western ideas of city and nation do not exhaust the Indigenous sense of country expressed by *The Swan Book*. Wright's literary city is permeable and multi-layered. Indigenous country has, for centuries, been erased entirely or buried beneath a colonial-capitalist, socio-material, and ultimately ephemeral urban palimpsest. Hidden life re-emerges as the palimpsest ruptures. The city is (re)populated, re-covered and transformed by wind, water, flora and fauna. Oblivia senses the intensive/transformational qualities of these more-than-human bodies. She carries an ecological imaginary entirely alien to conventional Western notions of urban metabolism and, consequently, she expresses an attunement to material transformations, to the undeniable and irresistible nonhuman bodies re-covering (recovering in) the city. We read that '[i]n this glimpse of paradise, the girl could see that much of the city had cracked; the city was breaking up, as though the land beneath had collapsed under its weight' (2958). Oblivia observes trees, ferns and grasses sprouting through footpath cracks, interrupting human movement. Moss and black lichen 'grew in profusion' (3379) on building walls and 'the natural landscape was quietly returning and reclaiming its original habitat' (2959). We read of 'overgrown hedges reaching for the sky' (3805) and of 'trees sprouting out of the sides of cathedrals, chestnuts growing from the alcoves; fig tree roots clung to the walls, and almond and apple trees grew from seeds that flourished in the damp cracks' (3714). Lizards and skinks take shelter in 'the old genie's shop,' along with owls and parrots 'from other places in the world' speaking dying languages (3670). Thousands of pigeons fly around rooftops, bats stream back and forth between city and botanical gardens, and black swans swarm and darken the city sky (3476), 'multiplying' (3711), 'overcrowding in the botanical gardens' (3764), and overfilling ponds and lakes.

Grounded in a divergent imaginary, Wright's novel offers a literary refusal of dominant urban imaginaries, expands the Lefebvrian notion of *inhabitant* to include the more-than-human, and revitalises Indigenous and other lives as participants in world and city-making. *The Swan Book* prompts a renewed attendance to human and more-than-human stories which continue to resonate above and beneath city surfaces, and which still find their way through the always-penetrable, matter-discursive mesh that we capitalist-colonisers have violently knitted together over more than two centuries. Readers are alerted to the risks of uncritically (re)producing and (re)enacting urban imaginaries. Particularly in hardly postcolonial contexts like Australia, exclusionary attempts to adapt to environmental crises and to build urban resilience may offer protections that serve only to reassert violent, exclusionary, colonial sovereignty and that ultimately prove illusory.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, while climate change and urban decay in *The Swan Book* affect the homeless unequally, rich and poor alike are forced to flee the city amid riots, storms, floods and intensifying collapse. And, even though rich, 'licensed travellers' (4252) have access to vehicles and roads, and the poor face a journey on foot, led by opportunistic people-smugglers across a deadly inundated landscape of water and swamp, they all become urban refugees as the city is unmade. Reading *The Swan Book*, we gain some sense of how *Anthropocenic* forces can overwhelm cities and urban imaginaries—particularly ideas of exclusion and inclusion—and expose them as no more than white Australian *dreamings*. We find that cities conceived as enclaves of the privileged and as 'holding space[s]' for white sovereignty (Watson 266) cannot endure.



While Hospital's narrations and characters in *The Last Magician* focus upon borders and separations (abysses) between city and its discarded bodies,<sup>17</sup> her writing of the quarry and Sydney's 'city proper' attests also to their mutual permeations, co-constitutions, interdependencies and entanglements, and to zones of contact in which another city entire is made. We read that it is believed homeless people began the quarry, though it might also have been *city* people displaced by inner-city insurance cost increases: 'No one knows' (86). It is a dynamic space, with no clear beginning or end; 'far larger than appears on the map' (95); and with 'miles and miles of intestines winding below' (100) the surface. Privileged people fear the quarry's continuous expansion. Fu Hsi-Charlie observes it 'growing, imperceptibly, relentlessly, inch by inch' (99); the tunnelled trajectories of the disenfranchised entangling themselves with the *city proper*: the quarry 'brushes us like cobwebs' and deals 'glancing blows' (95). The official city senses the quarry's subterranean 'seepage' (100) into city imaginary and city-making. 'Containment' (99) is an empty policy claim, and transversal flows between official and quarry Sydney are denied but not deniable. Trying to map and understand the quarry in his search for Cat, Gabriel observes that 'Things are more tangled up than anyone knows. The quarry props up a lot of walled gardens' (313) both materially and economically.

Hospital's Sydney *proper* and quarry interweave and co-constitute the city. Lucia-Lucy wonders, in this regard, 'Where else [but Sydney] is the membrane between manicured lawn and quarry so wafer thin' (370). Charlie's Place—a brothel and bar existing in what Lucia-Lucy calls 'the combat zone between city and quarry' (86) is one of the contact zones where city life arises in the *mixing* of quarry people and establishment people. Charlie's Place makes the city assemblage visible: it is 'the place to be seen' (87). We read that:

all strata and creeds and colours used to mix at Charlie's Place (well, not such a great range of colours, to be scrupulously accurate; for certain reasons, for certain—what shall I call them?—historical reasons, persons of darker persuasion were always under-represented, at least on the ground floor where the pub and the restaurant were). Still. The mix was decidedly eclectic, for that was one of the dispensations attaching to outsiders, a general moratorium on the rules. (85)

While Hospital's narrator alludes, here to the Indigenous peoples displaced and exploited by city-making, I confine my analysis to stories of *mixing*: of quarry people with lawyers, judges, politicians, media people, and the 'anti-establishment establishment' (86). Fu Hsi-Charlie, Gabriel, and Lucia-Lucy are among that mix. The Sydney elite's demand for flesh and sex produces and preserves the lives of prostitution we find in the quarry. Judge Robinson Gray denounces the moral depravity of what goes on in the quarry's dark places. However, as Sonny Blue, his desires and acts reproduce this state of affairs. All of Hospital's main characters exist on both sides of the supposed lines between city proper and quarry. Indeed, we might read them as always-collective subjectivities, rather than split or separable. Like the city, Lucia-Lucy, Fu Hsi-Charlie, and Robinson Gray-Sonny Blue construct facades to fit their changing surrounds but they cannot discard their other histories, relations, and selves, whatever they might claim or wish.

The quarry and city proper have always been bound together and interdependent, as are the lives of their inhabitants. While the quarry is an underground world, it is a product of city-making and it progressively infiltrates the body of the official city via its ever proliferating and expanding tunnel networks. Hospital generates a sense of this proliferation via Lucia-

Lucy's observations of the multiplying bodies in one of Charlie's photographs, and the photograph's title—*The Descent into Sydney*—re-affirms the inseparability of quarry and official city:

He descends. Down, down, down, past the honeycombed pitface, how many caves per circle, how many bodies per cave, how many new tunnels per body if each has a hammer and a trowel and one little, two little, three little, four, five little, six sticks of quarrymade dynamite, seven sniffs of glue, eight of smack, nine hypodermics, ten tokes of dynamite crack? (102)

Hospital encourages readers to encounter and imagine urban lives across more existential registers, rupturing the false boundaries of the hygienic, wealthy, civilised, striated city. Quarry and city proper identities are hybrids, or assemblages that do not easily conform with, and are not immediately capturable by, capitalism, nor are they defined by monetary exchange values. The quarry people, as well as those who traverse quarry and official city, exceed 'the functional logic of the city [proper]' (Horvath and Maicher 42). The quarry shapes lives differently and shapes different lives. Bodies experience other durations, with only 'Three years . . . till snuff-out time' (37) for quarry inhabitants. Other intensities flow and powers of living are transformed. We read, for instance, Lucia–Lucy's experience that 'Already we have a whole new range of underground hearing. . . . We read the dark. We decode it and swim in it so naturally that when I wake I feel for mutations: webbing between my toes, fur, gills' (18). A sense of collectivity and care is nurtured that differs from *proper* Sydney: 'All this love, this communion. It's very scarce above ground' (20). Bodies traverse one another and subjectivities become collective: 'we can dolphin about for hours in the ocean of I-am-you, you-are-me. Sometimes not' Lucia–Lucy tells us (20). We might begin to wonder where the ethical heart of the city beats and where existential freedom lies, when Lucia–Lucy tells us that the quarry is a realm in which 'all my possible lives' can be lived (21).

Hospital's city is not just streets, harbours, bridges, manicured gardens, and sunlight; it is also tunnels, ladders, underground honeycombs, wasted architectural shells, mud, and darkness. The quarry arises from, and expresses a freedom from capture by, dominant state, city, and civilisational apparatuses. To some it exceeds civilised ways of living, hence the desire to blow it up. However, the quarry attunes us to flows of intensities in new directions and these flows—burrowing into and transforming the 'city proper'—gesture toward the agency of what lies beyond the official city, and to the permeability that the privileged find too disturbing to admit. Through it, Hospital offers a different urban cartography and geography: an unmappable, unfathomable city inhabited by those whom the 'city proper' works to exclude *and* yet are found to be always-already members of it. It is not evocations of borders and abysses that carry the only potency as literary contributions to urban imaginaries, it is also Hospital's image, via Lucia–Lucy, of the 'hand inside a glove, like two spoons spooning' (21).

## Conclusion

How urban imaginaries are assembled informs what they can do, what other bodies can do, and, consequently, what cities can do. Wright and Hospital contest the bodies that participate in urban imaginaries, and they contest the practices of city-making by making visible more of the relations, bodies and acts involved in urban assemblages. By writing the irreducible relations between those deemed to be included and those deemed to be excluded, rather than

fashioning hermetically sealed, separate realms, they affirm the possibilities for different urban imaginaries and city-making.

As interventions in the productions of urban imaginaries, *The Swan Book* and *The Last Magician* are ‘disruptive . . . to the spectacle and performance’ (Petty, ‘London spikes’ 71) of the city as site, space, and process of successful capitalist-colonisation. Wright and Hospital’s literary cities are neither stable nor enduring. Nor are they places of security, hygiene, efficient urban metabolic processes, elevation, and smooth movement. They do not arrive at some imagined metabolic homeostasis or climactic state of human civilisational harmony. There is no *pure* city to be preserved and protected, and none to be built. The banishment and violent erasure of difference is not a durable option. The city cannot assert a centre for anything more than a short moment, but it can attend to its contact zones, its urban contagions, to where city-making occurs, and to the effects of the decisions made in these contact zones and in these city-making actions. Wright and Hospital write their literary cities across multiple existential registers (human and more-than-human) and in doing so, they emphasise the precarious and vital truth of variation and divergence that dominant urban imaginaries and presumptive city-makers may ignore, try to hide or displace. These literary cities are more-than-human assemblages of diverse participating bodies (inhabitants) in relation, and their qualities and capacities are never finalised.

Wright’s and Hospital’s novels resist the displacement of unhomed, homeless, and excluded bodies from processes of city space production. What a city can do is not solely a function of what its privileged bodies can do. City-making exceeds the elite, the human, and the sentient. Readers can imagine other city trajectories and other trajectories amid the city: not smooth, uninterrupted progressions, necessarily, but contagions: ‘relations not just of stability and rigidity, but of excess, flux, and transformation’ (McFarlane 654). ‘[U]rban actors, forms, or processes,’ as McFarlane argues elsewhere, ‘are defined less by a pregiven definition and more by the assemblages they enter and reconstitute’ (653). In particular, homelessness does not just function as the designation of an ‘unsanctioned form of difference’ (Petty, ‘London Spikes’ 73); it is at the same time a series of assemblages involved in urban productions (Lancione). Hospital’s quarry people and Wright’s street sleepers and Indigenous women attune us to other city-becomings, to other things that a city can do via other knowledges, modes of connection, apprehensions of interdependencies, and ethical and empathetic acts. The poor, the *surplus* bodies, those deemed to be a threat, are no less capable of care than others who deem themselves to be producer-defenders of the virtuous city for their *public*.

These inclusive literary cities—inhabited by the poor, the homeless, and the displaced—function *because of*, not in spite of, their permeability and the exteriority of their unavoidable relations. Their inclusiveness carries a health which has to do with nurturing capacities for transformation which do not comply with capitalist-colonial imaginaries and, therefore, may not continue as cities along the same trajectories that produce our present socio-ecological crises. Capitalist-colonisers are not the only ones with city visions; they are not the only city-makers. Cities are processual things-in-the-making, arising from interactions of different space-times (McFarlane 664), such as those of the quarry and of official Sydney, and those of western colonisers and Indigenous peoples and country. Wright’s and Hospital’s cities-in-the-making express the truth of variation and difference—the ‘ongoing spatiality of translation and mutation’ (666).

Wright and Hospital encourage readers to experience the affirmative potentials of embracing divergence: the potential for multiple ‘cities’ to become, including worlds made by those who have been excluded from *civilised* society. In *The Swan Book* and *The Last Magician*, we find other cities—though we may not even call them cities—other civilisational, relational articulations that exist alongside, remain unactualised in, are actualised by, intersect with, and transform what we try to reduce to the city. They are often unliveable. These are, to adapt Claire Colebrook’s words, ‘other worlds and other forms of existence still existing in the present, regardless of their functionality or feasibility for our future’ (452). In offering other worlds that run alongside and through the imagined capitalist-colonial city, Wright and Hospital offer readers opportunities to think beyond the city as a mode of preservation of certain ways of human life, and to reassess those ways of life as perhaps ‘not worthy of our care’ (453).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was inspired by and owes a number of debts to Emily Potter and the ideas and arguments she shared with me from her forthcoming paper on urban planning, urban imaginaries, colonial violence inflicted upon Indigenous ontic and epistemic practices and bodies, and the value of Indigenous stories as resources for resilient place-making.

<sup>2</sup> Liveability (The Economist Intelligence Unit) references annual comparative ratings of cities against criteria that do not include measures of inequality, poverty, or homelessness.

<sup>3</sup> Bender and Cinar’s list includes maps, business transactions, films, art, eating habits, novels, talk, stories, official discourse, monuments, statues, architecture, residential projects, urban planning schemes, newspapers, schools. I would expand this realm of bodies to include the more-than-human.

<sup>4</sup> By ‘ethically,’ I mean a Deleuzian immanent ethics, not referencing transcendent values or rules but evaluating actions on the basis of whether they limit or increase a subject’s (human or more-than-human) powers of living and, consequently, whether they open life out to the new.

<sup>5</sup> These arguments are derived from Emily Potter (‘Contesting’) and from a paper I co-authored with Potter, entitled *Making Cities: The Anthropocene, Climate Change, and Literary Contributions to Urban Imaginaries*, which is currently under review.

<sup>6</sup> For an exploration of the violence, denial and exclusion accompanying and expressing the colonial imaginary in Australia, its relationships with Indigenous onto-epistemologies, and its effects upon Indigenous well-being, see Potter (‘Contesting’).

<sup>7</sup> See Bender and Cinar; Gandy; Yusoff and Gabrys on this topic.

<sup>8</sup> See Potter (‘Contesting’) for an extended discussion of this point. See also Kwaymullina et al. (8–9) and Graham (72) on stories.

<sup>9</sup> Kwaymullina et al. (2013, 4) and Christie’s (2015) perspectives on Yolnu knowledge practices inform this overview.

<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre’s focus was the working class.

<sup>11</sup> See McFarlane, and DeLanda (‘Society’ and ‘Theory’) on cities and assemblage.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Amin and Thrift on infrastructure.

<sup>13</sup> See Rickards et al. on cyborg cities (1526).

<sup>14</sup> I note that in *The Swan Book*, Warren has the swamp blown up.

<sup>15</sup> As is Hospital’s quarry (16, 295, 324, 332, 374).

<sup>16</sup> A point Potter (‘Contesting’) makes more broadly with regard to urban planning.

<sup>17</sup> See Clark on Hospital’s attending to ‘the extremes of city life’ (108).

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